

*Evaluation of ESIF interventions –
keeping up with change*

Panel Session at

International Conference

Evaluation of ESIF interventions in Europe:

Between tradition and innovation

Bucharest 5th and 6th May 2022

Evaluation - keeping up with change

- ESIF interventions occur in dynamic settings: priorities change, crises occur – financial, health and political
- Evaluation plans and methodologies must also be dynamic and agile in order to contribute to policy accountability and strategic learning
- We have seen greater flexibility over recent programming periods – but not the same flexibility in evaluation
- This poses methodological as well as operational challenges – which is the subject of our panel discussion today

Evaluation - keeping up with change

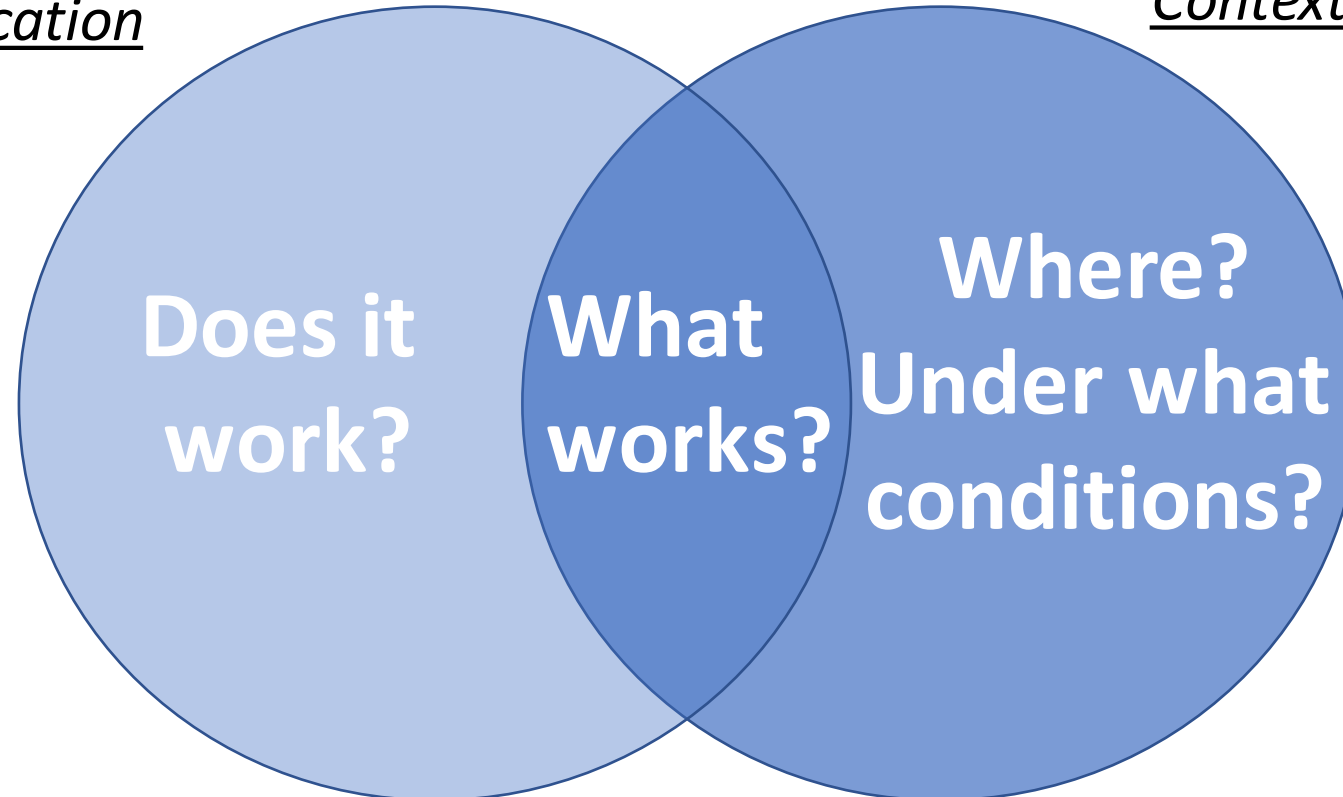
- We have a distinguished panel here today – each will introduce a topic to be discussed with panel colleagues & conference participants
- *Riccardo Crescenzi* will consider evaluation when context & programming unexpectedly change while evaluation is ongoing
- *Claudia Magdalena* will outline the challenges of integrating multi-level and multi-method evaluations
- *David Alba* will suggest how to accelerate policy learning from evaluation
- *Jan-Philipp Kramer* will discuss how best to integrate ESIF evaluations with national evaluation, planning and policy making

Evaluation for the (changing) needs of EU regions

Analyses of heterogeneous effects of policies
and programmes in different contexts

Identification

Contextualisation



Analyses of 'net' policy impact by
means of counterfactual methods
(*identification approaches*)

Analyses of territorial contextual
conditions and factors conditioning
success and failure
(*contextualisation approaches*)

The challenge integrating multi-level and multi method evaluation

I want to discuss 2 big **Challenges** with my panel colleagues and with participants at the conference

- ❑ **First:** Cohesion Policy is designed and implemented within a multi-level policy and governance framework:
a) Strategy (macro level) at European, national and territorial levels b) Operational Programmes (meso level) and
c) Projects (at the micro level).
- ❑ Evaluation are naturally built following the above framework, the bottom level feeding the upper ones. However, the policy frame is *multi-dimensional*: different sectors, territories with specific features (rural/urban, isolated, export dependent etc.) & various target groups (inactive, vulnerable, SMEs, research capacity etc.) SME programmes affect *both* the vulnerable & inactive as well as SMEs; and research support affects urban SMEs *and* the inactive:
- ❑ **Challenge One:** how should evaluations address the multi-dimensional character of interventions?
- ❑ **Second:** Global effects at macro level are usually assessed using modelling; meso level effects through counterfactual impact evaluations; and micro levels through case studies/cost benefit analyses (CBA) – even though we often lack basic information. The big problem is *limits to generalization* and *theory-based evaluation* is often presented as one way to generalize better
- ❑ **Challenge Two:** How do we integrate the different methodologies *and* at the same time integrate theory-based approaches into these different methodologies, i.e. modelling or counterfactual; case studies & CBA

How to accelerate policy learning from evaluation?

- Challenging to make useful evaluations because what is needed is not always the same as what is possible to be delivered; Evaluations struggle to address short term political agendas and to adapt to changing realities; Trying to satisfy all actors results in too many evaluations being “over scoped” which creates expectation gap and fatigue;
- To accelerate policy learning evaluations should become genuinely an integrative part of policymaking, which requires:
 - Properly planned focused evaluations enabled by policy design & building on existing literature;
 - Standardised, timely, staged evaluation products & knowledge base – education and communication to all stakeholders to manage expectations (not only manage but deliver on expectations in a timely manner);
 - Bridging & synthesizing evaluation activities & products by different actors.

How best to integrate ESIF evaluations with national evaluation, policy-making, planning and strategy making?

- ESIF and national structural policy are often lacking a common strategic framework and too little coherence, complementarity and coordination (3Cs) – this has direct implications for evaluation
- A pan-European logic to foster potential synergies between funds and programmes needs to be reemphasized, including a common framework for evaluation
- Common standards and frameworks for evaluation (based on Better Regulation Guidelines) are needed to increase harmonisation of evaluation requirements
- Evaluators operating at both EU and national/regional level need to engage as bridge-makers in policy learning
- More emphasis on dialogue fora is still needed that integrate national/EU perspectives.
- Outlook: National policy measures, when coordinated and complementary to ESIF, can stimulate investments that help address disparities. Differing policy cycles create an opportunity to learn, adapt, connect. Evaluation is decisive in enabling this.